

**DECISION  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**REDUCING MAMMAL DAMAGE  
THROUGH AN  
INTEGRATED WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM  
IN THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA, APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) program responds to requests for assistance from individuals, organizations and agencies experiencing damage caused by wildlife. Ordinarily, according to APHIS procedures implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), individual wildlife damage management actions may be categorically excluded (7 CFR 372.5(c), 60 Fed. Reg. 6000-6003, 1995). To evaluate and determine if any potentially significant impacts to the human environment from WS' planned and proposed program would occur, an environmental assessment (EA) was prepared. The EA documents the need for mammal damage management (MDM) in New Hampshire and assessed potential impacts of various alternatives for responding to damage problems. The EA analyzes the potential environmental and social effects for resolving mammal damage related to the protection of resources, and health and safety on private and public lands in New Hampshire. WS' proposed action is to implement an Integrated Wildlife Damage Management (IWDM) program on public and private lands in New Hampshire. Comments from the public involvement process were reviewed for substantive issues and alternatives which were considered in developing this decision.

WS is the Federal program authorized by law to reduce damage caused by wildlife (Act of March 2, 1931, as amended (46 Stat. 1486; 7 U.S.C. 426-426c) and the Rural Development, Agriculture, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1988, Public Law 100-102, Dec. 27, 1987. Stat. 1329-1331 (7 U.S.C. 426c), and the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2001, Public Law 106-387, October 28, 2000. Stat. 1549 (Sec 767). Wildlife damage management is the alleviation of damage or other problems caused by or related to the presence of wildlife, and is recognized as an integral part of wildlife management (The Wildlife Society 1992). WS uses an IWDM approach, commonly known as Integrated Pest Management (WS Directive 2.105) in which a combination of methods may be used or recommended to reduce damage. WS wildlife damage management is not based on punishing offending animals but as one means of reducing damage and is used as part of the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992, USDA 1997, WS Directive 2.201). The imminent threat of damage or loss of resources is often deemed sufficient for wildlife damage management actions to be initiated (U.S. District Court of Utah 1993). Resource management agencies, organizations, associations, groups, and individuals have requested WS to conduct mammal damage management to protect resources and human health and safety in New Hampshire. All WS wildlife damage management activities are in compliance with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders and procedures, including the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

**Consistency**

The analyses in the EA demonstrate that Alternative 2: 1) best addresses the issues identified in the EA, 2) provides safeguards for public health and safety, 3) provides WS the best opportunity to reduce damage while providing low impacts on non-target species, 4) balances the economic effects to agricultural and natural resources, and property, and 5) allows WS to meet its obligations to government agencies or other entities.

**Monitoring**

The New Hampshire WS program will annually review its impacts on target mammal species and other species addressed in the EA each year to ensure that WS program activities do not impact the viability of target and non-target wildlife species. In addition, the EA will be reviewed each year to ensure that it and the analysis are sufficient.

**Public Involvement**

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The pre-decisional EA was prepared and released to the public for a 46-day comment period by a legal notice in the *New Hampshire Union Leader* on July 8 and 9, 2005. A letter of availability for the pre-decisional EA was also mailed directly to agencies, organizations, and individuals with probable interest in the proposed program. No comments were received from the public after review of the pre-decisional EA.

### **Major Issues**

The EA describes the alternatives considered and evaluated using the identified issues. The following issues were identified as important to the scope of the analysis (40 CFR 1508.25).

- Effects on Target Mammal Species
- Effects on Other Wildlife Species, including T&E Species
- Effects on Human Health and Safety
- Impacts to Stakeholders, including Aesthetics
- Humaneness and Animal Welfare Concerns of Methods Used

### **Affected Environment**

The proposed action may be conducted on private, federal, state, tribal, county, and municipal lands in New Hampshire to protect agricultural and natural resources, property, and public health and safety. Areas of the proposed action could include, but are not limited to, state, county, municipal and federal natural resource areas, park lands, and historic sites; state and interstate highways and roads; railroads and their right-of-ways; property in or adjacent to subdivisions, businesses, and industrial parks; timberlands, croplands, and pastures; private and public property where burrowing mammals cause damage to structures, dikes, ditches, ponds, and levees; public and private properties in rural/urban/suburban areas where mammals cause damage to landscaping and natural resources, property, and are a threat to human safety through the spread of disease. The area of the proposed action would also include airports and military airbases where mammals are a threat to human safety and to property; areas where mammals negatively impacts wildlife, including T&E species; and public property where mammals are negatively impacting historic structures, cultural landscapes and natural resources.

### **Alternatives That Were Fully Evaluated**

The following four alternatives were developed to respond to the issues. Five additional alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail. Appendix B of the EA provides a description of the methods that could be used or recommended by WS under each of the alternatives. A detailed discussion of the effects of the Alternatives on the issues is described in the EA; below is a summary of the Alternatives.

**Alternative 1: Technical Assistance Only.** This alternative would not allow for WS operational MDM in New Hampshire. WS would only provide technical assistance and make recommendations when requested. Producers, property owners, agency personnel, corporations, or others could conduct MDM using any legal lethal or non-lethal method available to them. Property owners and land managers could implement their own mammal damage management program, use contractual services of private businesses, use volunteer services, or take no action. This alternative would place the immediate burden of operational damage management work on the property owners and other federal, state, or county agencies.

**Alternative 2: Integrated Mammal Damage Management Program (Proposed Action/No Action).** The USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services proposes to continue the current damage management program that responds to mammal damage in the State of New Hampshire. An IWDM approach would be implemented to reduce mammal damage to property, agricultural resources, natural resources, and human/public health and safety. Damage management would be conducted on public and private property in New Hampshire when the resource owner (property owner) or manager requests assistance. An IWDM strategy would be recommended and used, encompassing the use of practical and effective methods of preventing or reducing damage while minimizing harmful effects of damage management measures on humans, target and non-target species, and the environment. Under this action, WS could provide technical assistance and direct operational damage management, including non-lethal and lethal management methods by applying the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992). When appropriate, physical exclusion, habitat modification or

harassment would be recommended and utilized to reduce damage. In other situations, mammals would be removed as humanely as possible using: shooting, trapping, snaring, and FDA or EPA approved chemical products. In determining the damage management strategy, preference would be given to practical and effective non-lethal methods. However, non-lethal methods may not always be applied as a first response to each damage problem. The most appropriate response could often be a combination of non-lethal and lethal methods, or could include instances where application of lethal methods alone would be the most appropriate strategy.

Mammal damage management activities would be conducted in the State, when requested and funded, on private or public property, including airport facilities and adjacent or nearby properties, after an *Agreement for Control* or other comparable document has been completed. All management activities would comply with appropriate Federal, State, and Local laws, including applicable laws and regulations authorizing the take of mammals in New Hampshire.

**Alternative 3: Non-lethal Mammal Damage Management Only by WS.** This alternative would require WS to use non-lethal methods only to resolve mammal damage problems. Information on lethal MDM methods would still be available to producers and property owners through other sources such as USDA Agricultural Extension Service offices, New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG), universities, or pest control organizations. Requests for information regarding lethal management approaches would be referred to NHFG, local animal control agencies, or private businesses or organizations. Individuals might choose to implement WS non-lethal recommendations, implement lethal methods or other methods not recommended by WS, contract for WS direct control services, use contractual services of private businesses, or take no action. Persons receiving WS's non-lethal technical and direct control assistance could still resort to lethal methods that were available to them.

**Alternative 4: No Federal WS Mammal Damage Management.** This alternative would eliminate WS involvement in MDM in New Hampshire. WS would not provide direct operational or technical assistance and requesters of WS's assistance would have to conduct their own MDM without WS input. Information on MDM methods would still be available to producers and property owners through other sources such as USDA Agricultural Extension Service offices, NHFG, universities, or pest control organizations. Requests for information would be referred to NHFG, local animal control agencies, or private businesses or organizations. Property owners and land managers could implement their own mammal damage management program, use contractual services of private businesses, use volunteer services, or take no action. This alternative would place the immediate burden of operational damage management work on the property owners and other federal, state, or county agencies.

#### **Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail:**

**Lethal Mammal Damage Management Only By WS.** Under this alternative, WS would not conduct any nonlethal control of mammals for MDM purposes in the State, but would only conduct lethal MDM. This alternative was eliminated from further analysis because some mammal damage problems can be resolved effectively through nonlethal means. For example, a number of damage problems involving the encroachment of smaller mammals such as woodchucks under buildings can be resolved by installing barriers or repairing of structural damage to the buildings, thus excluding the animal. Further, such damage situations as immediately shooting an animal on a runway might not be possible, where as scaring them away through noise harassment might resolve the air passengers' threat at once.

**Compensation for Mammal Damage Losses.** The compensation alternative would require the establishment of a system to reimburse persons impacted by mammal damage. This alternative was eliminated from further analysis because no federal or state laws currently exist to authorize such action. Under such an alternative, WS would not provide any direct control or technical assistance. Aside from lack of legal authority, analysis of this alternative in the ADC Final EIS indicated that the concept has many drawbacks (USDA 1997):

- It would require larger expenditures of money and labor to investigate and validate all damage claims to determine and administer appropriate compensation.
- Compensation would most likely be less than full market value.

- Responding in a timely fashion to all requests to assess and confirm damage would be difficult and certain types of damage could not be conclusively verified. For example, proving conclusively in individual situations that mammals were responsible for disease outbreaks would be impossible, even though they may actually have been responsible. Thus, a compensation program that requires verification would not meet its objective for mitigating such losses.
- Compensation would give little incentive to resource owners to limit damage through improved cultural, husbandry, or other practices and management strategies.
- Not all resource owners would rely completely on a compensation program and unregulated lethal control would most likely continue as permitted by state law.
- Compensation would not be practical for reducing threats to human health and safety.

**Short Term Eradication and Long Term Population Suppression.** An eradication alternative would direct all WS program efforts toward total long term elimination of mammal populations on private, State, Local and Federal government land wherever a cooperative program was initiated in the State. In New Hampshire, eradication of native mammal species is not a desired population management goal of State agencies or WS. Eradication as a general strategy for managing mammal damage will not be considered in detail because:

- All State and Federal agencies with interest in, or jurisdiction over, wildlife oppose eradication of any native wildlife species.
- Eradication is not acceptable to most people.

Suppression would direct WS program efforts toward managed reduction of certain problem populations or groups. In areas where damage can be attributed to localized populations of mammals, WS can decide to implement local population suppression as a result of using the WS Decision Model. It is not realistic or practical to consider large-scale population suppression as the basis of the WS program. Typically, WS activities in the State would be conducted on a very small portion of the sites or areas inhabited or frequented by problem species.

**Nonlethal Methods Implemented Before Lethal Methods.** This alternative is similar to Alternative 2 except that WS personnel would be required to always recommend or use nonlethal methods prior to recommending or using lethal methods to reduce mammal damage. Both technical assistance and direct damage management would be provided in the context of a modified IWDM approach. Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, recognizes nonlethal methods as an important dimension of IWDM, gives them first consideration in the formulation of each management strategy, and recommends or uses them when practical before recommending or using lethal methods. However, the important distinction between the Nonlethal Methods First Alternative and the Proposed Alternative is that the former alternative would require that all nonlethal methods be used before any lethal methods are recommended or used.

While the humaneness of the nonlethal management methods under this alternative would be comparable to the Proposed Program Alternative, the extra harassment caused by the required use of methods that may be ineffective could be considered less humane. As local mammal populations increase, the number of areas negatively affected by mammals would likely increase and greater numbers of mammals would be expected to congregate at sites where nonlethal management efforts were not effective. This may ultimately result in a greater numbers of mammals being killed to reduce damage than if lethal management were immediately implemented at problem locations. Once lethal measures were implemented, mammal damage would be expected to drop relative to the reduction in localized populations of animals causing damage.

Since in many situations this alternative would result in greater numbers of animals being killed to reduce damage, at a greater cost to the requester, and result in a delay of reducing damage in comparison to the Proposed Alternative, the Nonlethal Methods Implemented Before Lethal Methods Alternative is removed from further discussion in this document.

**Bounties.** Payment of funds (bounties) for killing some mammals suspected of causing economic losses have not been supported by many State agencies as well as most wildlife professionals for many years (Latham 1960, Hoagland

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1993). WS concurs with these agencies and wildlife professionals because of several inherent drawbacks and inadequacies in the payment of bounties, including:

- Bounties are generally ineffective at controlling damage, especially over a wide area such as New Hampshire,
- Circumstances surrounding the take of animals are typically arbitrary and completely unregulated,
- It is difficult or impossible to assure animals claimed for bounty were not taken from outside the damage management area, and
- WS does not have the authority to establish a bounty program.

#### **Finding of No Significant Impact**

The analysis in the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment as a result of this proposed action. I agree with this conclusion and therefore find that an EIS need not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

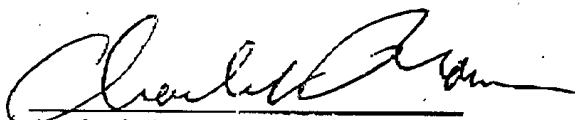
1. Mammal damage management as conducted by WS in New Hampshire is not regional or national in scope.
2. The proposed action would pose minimal risk to public health and safety. Risks to the public from WS methods were determined to be low in a formal risk assessment (USDA 1997, Appendix P).
3. There are no unique characteristics such as park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic areas, or ecologically critical areas that would be significantly affected. Built-in mitigation measures that are part of WS's standard operating procedures and adherence to laws and regulations will further ensure that WS activities do not harm the environment.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. Although there is some opposition to wildlife damage management, this action is not highly controversial in terms of size, nature, or effect.
5. Based on the analysis documented in the EA and the accompanying administrative file, the effects of the proposed damage management program on the human environment would not be significant. The effects of the proposed activities are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for any future action with significant effects.
7. No significant cumulative effects were identified through this assessment. The EA discussed cumulative effects of WS on target and non-target species populations and concluded that such impacts were not significant for this or other anticipated actions to be implemented or planned within the State.
8. The proposed activities would not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would they likely cause any loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. If an individual activity with the potential to affect historic resources is planned under the selected alternative, then site-specific consultation as required by Section 106 of the NHPA would be conducted as necessary.
9. WS has determined that the proposed project would not adversely affect any Federal or New Hampshire State listed threatened or endangered species. This determination is based upon concurrence from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and NHFG that the project will not likely adversely affect any threatened or endangered species in New Hampshire.
10. The proposed action would be in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws.

#### **Decision and Rationale**

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I have carefully reviewed the Environmental Assessment prepared for this proposal and the input from the public involvement process. I believe that the issues identified in the EA are best addressed by selecting Alternative 2 (Integrated Mammal Damage Management Program (Proposed Action/No Action) and applying the associated standard operating procedures discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Alternative 2 is selected because (1) it offers the greatest chance at maximizing effectiveness and benefits to resource owners and managers while minimizing cumulative impacts on the quality of the human environment that might result from the program's effect on target and non-target species populations; (2) it presents the greatest chance of maximizing net benefits while minimizing adverse impacts to public health and safety; and, (3) it offers a balanced approach to the issues of humaneness and aesthetics when all facets of these issues are considered. Therefore, it is my decision to implement the preferred alternative as described in the EA.

Copies of the EA are available upon request from the New Hampshire State Wildlife Services Office, 59 Chenell Dr., Suite 7, Concord, NH 03301.



Charles S. Brown, Regional Director  
APHIS-WS Eastern Region

8/30/05  
Date

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